



Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer



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harmonization
WORKING TOGETHER FOR CANCER PREVENTION

NEWS RELEASE

Early research shows information gap between smoking and surgery complications in Northern BC

Prince George, BC (November 13, 2013) – The first results of a new study underway in Northern BC has shown that approximately half of patients who recently had surgery were not aware of surgical complications related to smoking.

The study is part of the Stop Smoking Before Surgery initiative funded by the Canadian Cancer Society, as part of the Harmonization Project, a collaboration between the Canadian Cancer Society, BC Cancer Agency and Northern Health, along with researchers at the University of British Columbia and Athabasca University. The goal of the initiative is to increase awareness of the benefits of smoking cessation prior to surgery as well as to support patients in their decision to stop smoking before surgery.

“The smoking rate in Northern BC is substantially higher than elsewhere in our province at 24 per cent versus 13 per cent,” explains Kerensa Medhurst, Health Promotion Coordinator, Canadian Cancer Society, BC and Yukon. “We know that the Northern region has the highest rate of lung cancer in the province and avoiding tobacco can reduce cancer risk. Non-emergency surgery can open the door for positive conversations around smoking cessation while also providing an incentive and timeline to stop smoking.”

Surgical patients from Northern BC were screened for smoking status. Twenty-three per cent were smokers and 159 of these completed a telephone survey. Overall, about half were not aware of the perioperative complications associated with smoking such as slowing the healing of wounds, increasing the risk of infection, increasing complications with anaesthetic as well as increasing the risk of future heart or lung problems.

“Surgery is a teachable moment because patients already have a heightened concern for their health and well-being,” explains Nancy Viney, Population Health, Tobacco Reduction, Northern Health. “There is a real opportunity to encourage more patients to quit and increase awareness of provincial resources for smoking cessation in Northern BC, which could make a huge difference not only to post-surgical complications but also to lung cancer incidence and mortality rates in the North. While we know in many cases these conversations are happening, we’d like to see them happening more consistently.”

The Stop Smoking Before Surgery initiative will support health care professionals to consistently provide advice and counselling to patients who smoke and provide new resources to support patients in quitting smoking before their surgery. The initiative aligns with current efforts in Northern Health to expand hospital-based smoking cessation services and also with the BC Ministry of Health’s recent initiative to provide smoking cessation aids such as free nicotine gum or patches.



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“This is a landmark initiative,” says Dr. Ronald Chapman, Vice President, Medicine and Clinical Programs, Northern Health. “We are Northerners conducting research in the North, for the North. While we have a long way to go and more work to do, we believe this project can make a significant difference in reducing cancer incidence rates in the North and saving lives.”

“In conjunction with a second project that will be focused on men’s healthy eating and active living, the Harmonization Project received \$928,000 of funding through the Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute and is expected to run until 2015.”

For 75 years the Canadian Cancer Society has been with Canadians in the fight for life. We have been relentless in our commitment to prevent cancer, fund research and support Canadians touched by cancer. From this foundation, we will work with Canadians to change cancer forever so fewer Canadians are diagnosed with the disease and more survive. When you want to know more about cancer, visit our website at cancer.ca or call our toll-free bilingual Cancer Information Service at 1-888-939-3333; TTY, 1-866-786-3934.

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